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| Ontario | 29e | 4e | Discours sur l’éducation | 7 novembre 1974 | Thomas Wells | Minister of Education | Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario |

Yes, Mr. Chairman, in presenting the estimates of the Ministry of Education for the fiscal year 1974-1975, I am pleased to be able to report continued improvement in many aspects of our public and separate school systems in this province. I would like to comment briefly on some of the tangible achievements of the past year-and in a sense present a progress report on Ontario education, however necessarily superficial it may be this afternoon because of its brevity.

Education, of course, Mr. Chairman, continues to be a principal priority of this government. Including post-secondary, it is the largest single component of the 1974-1975 Ontario budget, accounting for 29 per cent of the total provincial spending.

The estimates, which I am presenting today for the Ministry of Education, are for $1,496,896,000. The major portion of this; 89 percent, is turned over directly to local school boards in grants to assist them in operating their schools. This represents 60 per cent of the total costs of elementary education in Ontario. The remaining amount, of course, is raised by school boards through properly taxes in individual municipalities.

Mr. Chairman, of the remaining 11 per cent of the amount of money in these estimates, 7.3 percent is for transfer and statutory payments made directly to other educational agencies and programmes, such as the teachers' superannuation fund, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, the Ontario Educational Communications Authority, and research and other educational grants.

The final 3.7 percent of these estimates is for the direct operating expenditures of the Ministry of Education, which not only include administration and support services, but also the schools operated directly by us, such as those for the blind and the deaf, the Ontario Teacher Education College, and our extensive correspondence course programme.

These estimates for 1974-1915 represent an increase of 8.73 per cent over those of a year ago. During the past years one area that has been given top priority in the Ministry of Education is special education. This includes an programmes and services for exceptional children; that is, children who have learning disabilities and difficulties, as well as children who are gifted and talented.

 To ensure that this highly specialized field of education receives renewed attention, we established a new special education branch, effective July 1, 1974. The overall goal of the branch is to develop policies and programmes designed to assist local school boards in providing appropriate educational opportunities of recognized quality of all: exceptional children in Ontario.

The new branch is providing a very clear and identifiable point of focus within the ministry, so that our professionals' in this field are easily accessible to all those who have problems and concerns related to special education. In addition to their responsibilities, the staff is performing an ombudsman type of role on behalf of the children with learning disabilities of all types. The new branch has already strengthened a close liaison with other ministries, such as Health and Community' and Social Services, in order to provide effective co-ordination among these ministries providing services for exceptional children.

Each of our nine regional offices will have one or more persons clearly identified as special educational officers. Their responsibilities will include getting out into the community to assist local school officials in assessing special education needs and policies in their areas, and to get involved with parents groups, providing information and assistance at all levels.

About a year ago, Mr. Chairman, I also appointed a minister’s advisory council on special education; already the council has had a considerable impact on our activities. Indeed, one of their recommendations was the establishment of the special education branch. The council represents parents, teachers and trustees, and there is no doubt at all that it is providing a continuing and strengthening of the liaison between the ministry and those we serve in helping to provide educational programmes and services £or exceptional children.

We now have advisory councils for each of the provincial schools for the blind and the deaf, made up of parents, teachers, blind and deaf adults, and representatives of organizations of and for the blind and the deaf, labour and industry. These councils meet regularly to discuss and advise the ministry on those matters referring to the education, growth and development of blind and deaf children.

By any' objective and honest comparison, progress in the past year has reconfirmed that today Ontario is second to few, if any, jurisdictions anywhere in the services provided to exceptional children. Of course, we also believe there is much still to be done. And, Mr. Chainman, we continue to move ahead. We shall try to strengthen the partnership among parents, teachers, school administrators, trustees, representatives of interested associations and officials of the Ministry of Education, to this end.

Mr. Chairman, through 1974 there has been a great deal of forward movement related to the adoption of the metric system in Ontario education and, in fact, all across Canada. The ministers of education for all provinces are working toward the implementation of the metric system in our schools by 1978, on the premise that the federal government will follow through on the metrification time line that has been announced.

Of course, this has major implications everywhere, and most especially for our schools. The changeover to metric is more fundamental than it may appear on the surface. It involves looking at the process of quantification and measurement in ways that are quite different born those we have been accustomed to. It means changing textbooks and learning materials of all kinds. Many items of equipment will become obsolete and will have to be modified' or replaced.

The phasing-in process in Ontario will require careful planning, and we are sparing no effort in this regard. It will also involve extra expenditures by school boards. In order to ease the financial burden we anticipate providing special metrification grants over and above the regular legislative grants in 1975. I might point out that many boards of education, Mr. Chairman, have already established their priorities in this area and have begun the necessary planning and in-service teacher preparation.

Another area that has received top priority during 1974, and will receive top priority in the year ahead, is the teaching of French, both in English- and French-language schools. Last year we commissioned a ministerial committee on the teaching of French. Its report, known as the Gillin report after its chairman, is being seriously studied right now.

Mr. Chairman, new approaches will emerge in due course and all of those who have a particular feel for the importance of the French fact in Canada life should keep their spirits high, and also realistic. In this connection, we are also keeping close watch on a number of research studies presently being carried on, particularly in the Ottawa area. From the results of these and other studies, we hope, to learn how we can build soundly and achieve our desired objectives of strengthening the teaching and learning of French throughout the province.

The government's position on this matter I think, Mr. Chairman, is well known. We are in complete accord with a statement in the Gillin report that study of French brings "a healthy attitude toward French and a sympathetic understanding of the people who speak it . . . Learning both the languages, French and English, encourages the growth of communication and respect, both of which are needed to bind this nation together. . ."

That is a quote, Mr. Chairman, from the Gillin report which, as I say, we are in accord with. The report goes on to say, and again we support this most strongly. There is a growing feeling that Ontario, as Quebec's nearest neighbour, should take the lead in promoting French rights and the French language. This province has the educational system, the wealth and the goodwill to ease some of the strains in the fabric of Confederation.

Mr. Chairman, during 1974 we have been pleased to observe the appearance of some local committees to study the question of moral education. In large measure, this has resulted from an appeal I made earlier this year. It is a difficult area, fraught with potential misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

While it is clear that our public schools cannot promote the doctrines of any particular religious group, this does not mean that they should neglect the many ethical issues that confront young people of all religious persuasions. Our students should be prepared to make sound moral choices in dealing with many complex problems as they learn to function in the social, political and economic spheres.

This year, 1974, has seen a continued emphasis on elementary education in general. An example of this is the special committee that studied the differences between elementary and secondary ceilings. In its report, this committee observed:

It is apparent that consideration should be given to increasing the funding for the early years of a child's education. Children should be given as positive an initial school experience as possible.

More emphasis on dealing with students' individual problems in the early years could greatly reduce the self-selection process which causes those students with unattended problems to drop out.

The government fully recognizes the importance of the early years of a child's education. We recognize that today in Ontario a need is perceived for additional discretion under our ceilings policy to support and strengthen elementary school programmes and to ensure that our schools have the necessary resources to provide the kind of education which young children deserve and which parents rightfully expect.

As a result, Mr. Chairman, when the spending ceilings for 1975 were announced last month, school boards were given the added flexibility of being able to increase their spending by an additional $80 per elementary pupil over and above the basic 13 per cent increase in ceilings that was announced at that time.

During the past year, Mr. Chairman, major work has been done on the new curriculum guidelines for the primary and junior divisions in a document that is commonly known as P(1) J(1). We've come a long way this year and we expect to see the fruits of these labours within the next two or three months. The new document, when it is published, will almost assuredly be a leader in pointing the direction to the future, insofar as the very important early years of a child's formal education are concerned.

Among other things, the new official P(l) J(l) document will specify the particular skills and knowledge which children in the earlier grades should have an opportunity of attaining. As always, great stress will be laid upon the individual capabilities and differences among children.

While the new P(l) J(l) circular will clarify the provincial goals to be promoted and the ministry's expectations for this programme, it will leave to the teacher's; discretion the specific methods to be applied: and the illustrations to be used. Thus the teacher which continue to have fun scope for adapting- the programme to meet the individual student's needs.

The official P(l) J(1) curriculum guideline will be backed up by a much lengthier publication, entitled "Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions." This will explore the objectives of the curriculum in much more detail, and explain what is known of the development process at this level. And it win help enlarge the teacher's background of understanding so they will know why certain approaches are likely to be successful.

Mr. Chairman, the third component of this comprehensive new curriculum package win be a battery of support documents which will give down-to-earth practical examples of how to go about achieving the provincial goal. These documents win be of considerable assistance to many teachers, especially inexperienced ones, in selecting and using content and materials.

The ministry's regional staff will also be working with local supervisor officials and consultants to ensure that all teachers have a thorough working knowledge of the primary and junior programmes, as well as providing direct assistance where appropriate and when appropriate.

Mr. Chairman, the year 1974 has also seen major changes in teacher education in Ontario. There are about 5,600 teachers-in-training in the 11 schools and colleges of education this year. This is an increase of about 1,000 over last year. The supply of new teachers for the 1974-1975 year is about equal to the demand, with well over 90 per cent of our graduates obtaining positions. But there were shortages in particular needs, such as technical, French language, and special education. Steps are being taken to increase the numbers in these particular needs, although the shortage of teachers in French language schools and the teachers of French in English-language schools is likely to remain serious for some time.

The preparation of teachers for the school system, of course, is one of the basic responsibilities of the Minister of Education, and we have been moving ahead in this area as well during the past year. In September, Sudbury Teachers' College was integrated into the faculty of education of Laurentian University, and the Ottawa Teachers' College became part of the faculty of education of the University of Ottawa.

This completed the policy of integrating teachers' colleges with the faculties of education. However, instead of integrating all our institutions, the remaining teachers' colleges in Hamilton and Ontario were organized into the Ontario Teacher Education College and retained as part of the Ministry of Education. Already, Mr. Chairman, it is very clear that this will ensure a healthy diversity in the ways in which teachers are educated in this province and it wilt enable the ministry to respond: quickly and directly to emergencies and new needs.

 One example of this was evident during this past summer, when the ministry offered a special programme for training native teachers for the province. There were 96 successful candidates in the course, which was held at the Hamilton campus. Most of these people are presently teaching or otherwise assisting in the education of native students in this province. The second part of the training in this programme will be given next summer by the ministry.

This project has been an excellent example of close co-operation between this ministry, the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and organizations of native people, in providing improved programmes for our native people. Mr. Chairman, when the establishment of the Ontario Teacher Education College was announced, we also indicated our intention to appoint a minister's advisory committee for the college. This 12-member group will advise me on programme policy at the college and will assure that the college will be both innovative and sound in its offerings. The members of this committee will be announced in the very near future.

Mr. Chairman, the year 1974 has been a year of further consolidation and refinement at the secondary school level. The latest edition of circular HS(1) is for a two-year, rather than the traditional one-year period. Teachers and administrators thus will be able to plan with confidence for a longer period of time.

 Well, that's longer than one year. That's right. It is a 100 per cent increase as the hon. member says. There will be less reason for the criticism we have sometimes heard in the past that changes come in such quick succession that it is difficult to keep up with them. Mr. Chairman, our secondary schools are continuing to offer a balanced programme. Enrolment in such subjects as mathematics, English and the sciences continues to reflect a very high degree of interest in the traditional academic subjects on the part of our students. For many students, the vocationally oriented courses in secondary schools are offering new opportunities to enhance their ability to deal with the problems of everyday living.

The credit system has helped to break down the rigid barriers between programmes so that students can, for example include one or more technical courses in a predominantly academic programme. Thus they can acquire a basis for the technological literacy that is so useful in our society.

Beginning this year, it has become mandatory that students earn four credits in English studies and two credits in Canadian studies before they can qualify for a secondary school graduation diploma. These new requirements will result in an increased emphasis on communication skills and a better knowledge and appreciation of our Canadian heritage and national identity. There are also many studies in the general area of the quality and protection of human life that are receiving increasing emphasis. Many of these programmes will involve close co-operation with ministries of the Ontario government other than Education-for example, driver education which is now being studied by a joint task force made up of the officials of the ministries of Education and Transportation and Communications.

Preparation for effective living, Mr. Chairman, includes family studies, nutrition and physical activity. The health, growth and development of our children will be aided by enriched programmes in nutrition and physical activity that reflect our growing awareness of the physical fitness needs of our young people and children. This national priority will be given particular emphasis by my ministry in co-operation with related programmes in other ministries.

During 1974, we have been looking at ways in which activities carried out partly or entirely outside the school, which have a substantial educational component, can be recognized for credit toward a secondary school diploma. The activities being looked at are of three kinds: work experience, community service and the use of community resources for independent study or class purposes.

Part of the same process is the anticipated provision for certain young people to be excused from school attendance at the age of 14 or 15. Such students may find suitable employment or other opportunities for activities of an educational nature. They will be kept on the school rolls and under the broad supervision of the school to ensure that they are not being exploited. In this way, I think,

Mr. Chairman, we are recognizing the small but significant number of individuals for whom school attendance is not the most constructive experience available.

In view of the increasing number of alternatives, dropping out does not have the same implication that it used to have. It is much less likely to signify the end of educational: opportunities but may simply mean that education is being conducted in another form. It is interesting to note that the drop-in rate, that is, the rate of return to school after an interruption, has doubled in recent years.

To get a better insight into the drop-out problem, research has been initiated: in two areas. In the French language schools, Mr. Chairman, the retention question has been under study by an OISE team, financed by a ministry for the past three years. The ministry has also entered into a contract with OISE researchers to study the problem concerning dropouts in the school system as a whole.

There is nothing wrong with OJJSE. It is doing a good job now. I think my friend would agree to that. A good number of his friends are up there. Well, I think they are beginning to agree.

Another major area of activity during the past year has been the very important field of evaluation. As we are all aware, there has been considerable public demand for effective evaluation of our educational efforts. The cry is both for evaluation of individual students progress and for evaluation of educational systems.

To meet concerns related to assessment of individual student progress we have established a committee that has been at work during the past year studying evaluation of student achievement. We are optimistic that some very tangible and concrete results will emerge from this committee in the near future. I might say, Mr. Chairman, we view this as an extremely high priority matter.

Of course, the ministry has for some time been promoting the idea of evaluation as an integral part of the teaching-learning process. Thus there has been a move away from the long, formal examinations at the end of the year in favour of more short tests, class period tests, evaluation of daily performance.

In order to improve the process of measurement and evaluation in the classroom, I believe teachers in training at colleges and faculties of' education are receiving better preparation than ever before in this area. Additional help is also being made available in in-service programmes as we1l.

Mr. Chairman, further to the matter of evaluation in education, 1974 has seen major strides taken by our Educational Resources' Allocation System project. This group has been developing a comprehensive and systematic approach to decision-making and the management of school systems.

It is currently involved in 16 projects with school boards across the province. The ERAS project, as it is known colloquially, deserves serious consideration by all those involved with education, particularly in the light of all our concerns about long-term planning for educational development and for effective management of our school systems.

Recognizing these principles, we have been encouraging school boards to use a new service initiated by the ministry which involves the co-operative evaluation of a school system. This service is set up at the request of a local board and includes both internal and external teams of evaluators.

The internal evaluation team is composed of teachers, parents, students, administrators and any other interested people in the community. They concentrate on examining the effectiveness of working relationships, but steer clear of assessing the performance of individuals. The external team includes educators from other systems outside the system being evaluated and is composed, say, of trustees, teachers and ministry officials.

After the internal and external teams have completed their independent assessments, they compare notes and report to the school board. This process focuses attention on the strengths and weaknesses of the system and provides a sound basis for educational improvements.

To date, four of these co-operative educational projects have been completed with the West Parry Sound Board of Education, the Dryden Board of Education, the Ottawa Separate School Board and the Department of National Defence Schools in Germany. Two or more projects are currently under way with the Manitoulin Island Board of Education and the Kirkland Lake Separate School Board. Five' possible additional projects are now at the negotiation stage. We hope that increasing numbers of school boards will avail themselves of the opportunity of utilizing this cooperative evaluation service.

Mr. Chairman, one of the major steps taken just recently has been the development and announcement. of a new ministry programme designed to substantially increase the interaction between local schools and community residents. We, of course, strongly support the idea of the local neighborhood school serving as the catalyst toward developing a community identity, a community sense of involvement and spirit, and a place where men and women and young people can go freely, for whatever purpose, without feeling threatened or out of place.

To this end, we outlined a six-point programme, which the Ministry of Education will implement beginning immediately.

 1. We will create a community schools unit within the ministry. There will be a small staff at the central office at Queen's Park. In addition, a community education officer will be designated within all nine of our regional offices throughout the province.

 The community schools unit will be backed up by an advisory committee, which will include representatives of provincial associations concerned with education, recreation and community affairs. The committee's main purpose will be to ensure that we have firsthand knowledge and expertise at our disposal, and that co-operation, co-ordination and advice are at a maximum.

 2. The ministry will provide backing to school boards who really want to get serious about community schools or to try the idea on for size. Boards of education and Roman Catholic separate school boards will be able to submit specific proposals for new or expanded programmes, including staff needs that might be involved. For the remainder of the present school year, 1974-1975, we will support boards to a maximum of $10,000 per approved project. We have already mailed details of this plan to school boards, Mr. Chairman, so that proposals can be submitted by the end of December. The same programme will be continued throughout the 197.5-1976 school year.

 3. We will soon initiate a project to produce a practical handbook of facts, ideas and examples related to community schools. This handbook will serve a dual function, hopefully, in serving to inform and stimulate both school principals and their staffs and interested citizens.

 4. We will continue to allow school boards, if they wish, to classify their expenditures related to community use of school facilities as being outside the educational spending ceilings.

 5. We will officially and strongly again support the idea of full community use of school facilities after regular school hours. As well, we support the community use of vacant school facilities during school hours where appropriate, provided that other school boards do not require this space. And we will do everything possible to facilitate arrangements to these ends.

 6. We will officially and strongly urge school boards to examine their procedures and policies related to their liaison and cooperation with other agencies serving the community with a view to improving the lines of communication between these agencies, which of course is a necessity if a community school in the truest sense is to be developed.

These are the six essential ingredients in this first phase of an active plan to encourage the development of the community school idea all across Ontario where it is not now presently operating, Mr. Chairman.

I have indicated today a number of the priority matters with which the Ministry of Education has concerned itself during the past year, and with which we will move forward during the coming year. There are, of course, many more that could be mentioned, but the essential message is that all of these and other activities are intended for one purpose and one purpose only-to contribute ultimately to what goes on for each student in the classrooms of this province.

I think, Mr. Chairman, never should we forget that in education the priority that stands above all others is that we must continue to provide the kind of educational experiences that will best equip and prepare the young people of today to take their places as knowledgeable, sensitive and aware members of a society, a society that of course will soon be theirs to lead, and that will also prepare and equip and make them ready to participate in meeting and solving the problems of their community, their country and the world at large.